
AN ABBREVIATED

History
OF
TRANSPORTATION

In Montgomery County

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A STAFF REPORT

prepared by the

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Transportation Planning Division



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
8787 Georgia Avenue / Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Preface

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THIS PUBLICATION DESCRIBES

THE HISTORY OF

TRANSPORTATION IN

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FROM

THE 18TH CENTURY

TO THE PRESENT.

IT WAS WRITTEN TO PROVIDE

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE

TRANSITWAY AND

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE

NETWORK MASTER

PLAN.

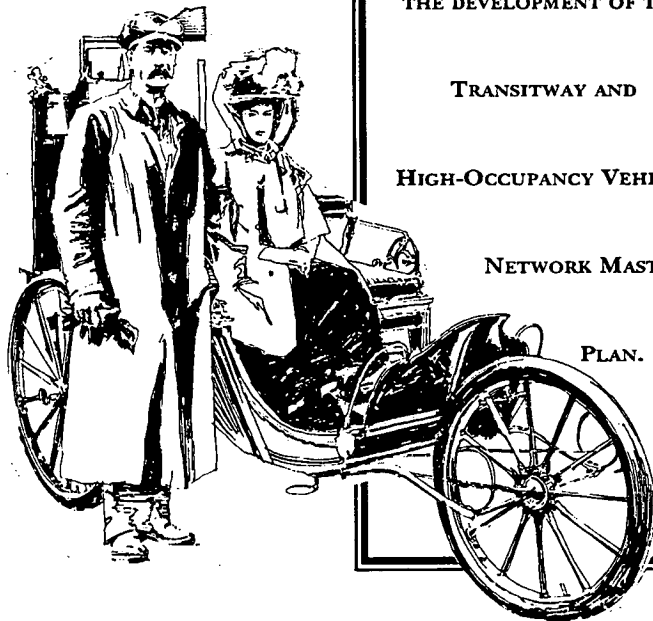


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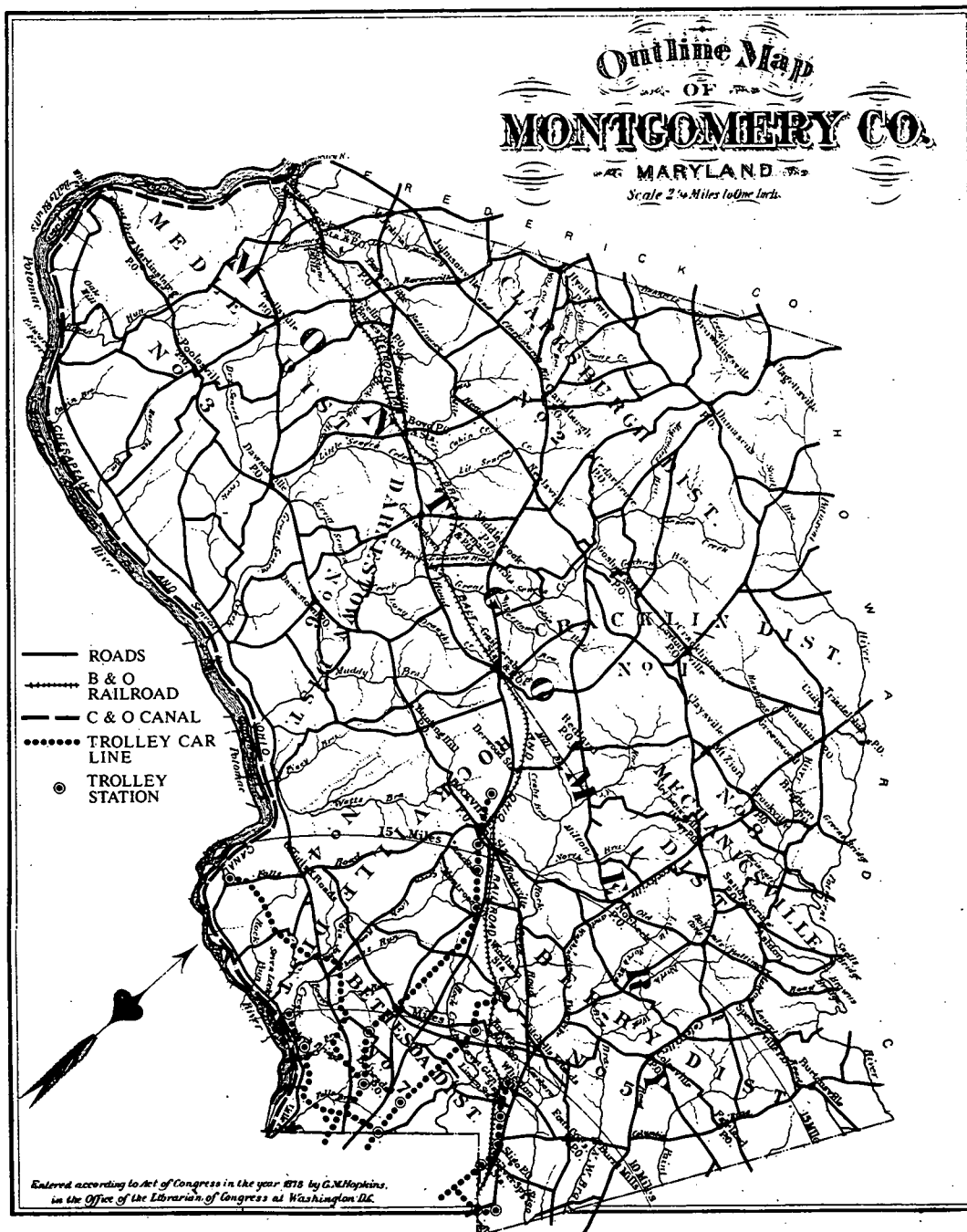
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“Kounty J. Kuryosities”



“Old Tracks, old tracks, why are you here?
From Washington to Rockville fair
My limbs stretched out for many a year. Across my
 ribs the streetcars flounced
The noblest of your sons I bounced
Until bus service was announced.
So now I lie here sore abused
Slowly to dust to be reduced,
Unwept, unhonored, and unused.”

by Hillbilly Hill ¹



This map shows details of Montgomery County's sophisticated transportation network system as of 1918.

An Abbreviated History of Transportation in Montgomery County

The development of the Transitway and High-Occupancy Vehicle Network Master Plan is another major step in the evolution and refinement of Montgomery County's transportation system. This evolution was set into motion when the Piscataway Indians first created footpaths linking significant tribes of the Potomac with hunting grounds and tribes in Pennsylvania. Early colonists improved these paths and the outline of the County's road system began to take form.

As the years advanced, further improvements were made to enhance transportation throughout the County. A canal system was created linking farmers with markets along the Potomac. Majestic steam locomotives roared into and across the County's interior, giving farmers access to neighboring counties and beyond. By the turn of the 20th century, a sophisticated trolley line system fanned out from the nation's capital, bringing vacationers to luxurious country resorts and commuters to nearby suburban neighborhoods. Turnpikes, the forerunners of an extensive and modern highway system, reshaped the rural countryside, creating routes which joined residential and employment centers within and bordering the County. Cars, buses and Metrorail brought us to the modern day.

The evolution of the County's transportation system is an on-going and challenging process. A process that is molded by four basic and essential elements—time, money, demand and technology. These elements carved the roads, waterways and rails of Montgomery County's transportation history and will play an equally important role in transportation decisions made for the future.

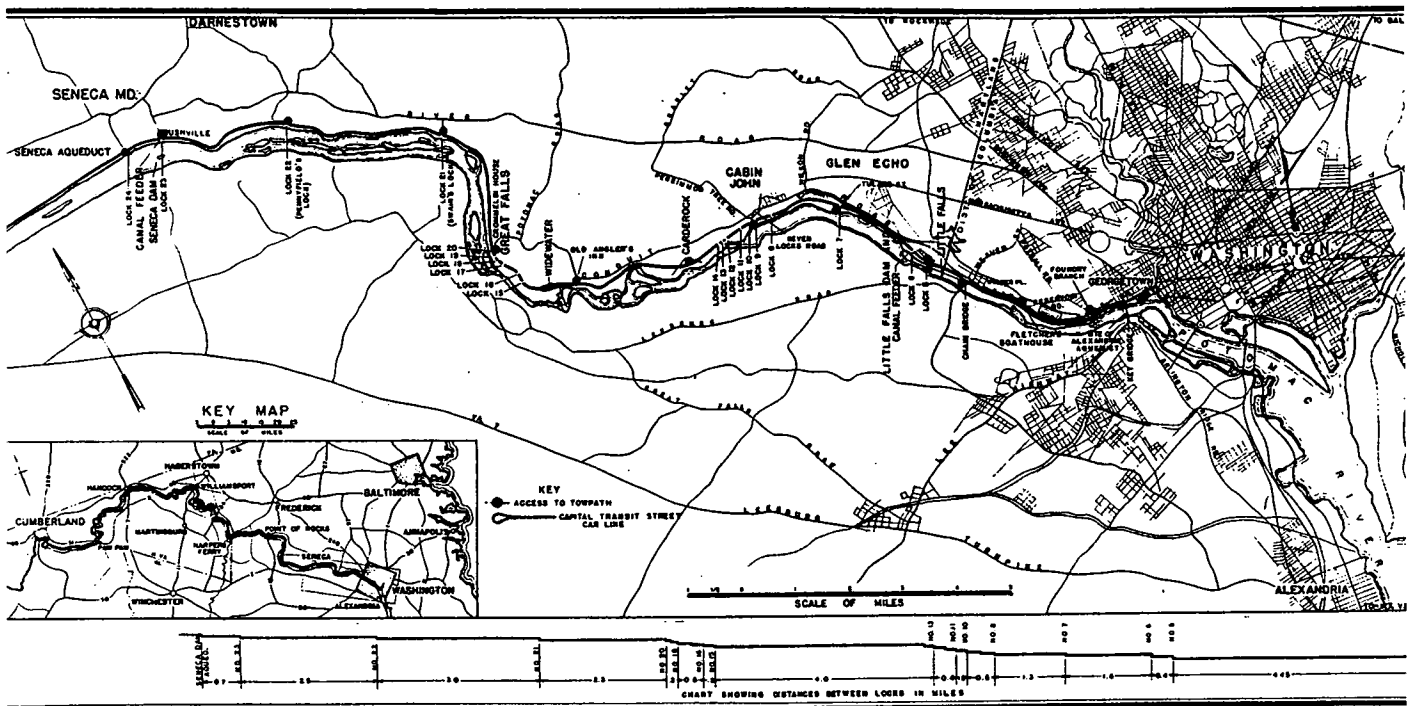
To better understand the plans we make for the future, it is important to examine the past. The following, is a brief historical look at the development of the

County's transportation system since its early days. It gives an insight to the evolution of the County's transportation system to date and, therefore, a foundation for considering and analyzing transportation plans to be made for the future.

Taming the Potomac

Waterways provided the first opportunity for commercial trade in Montgomery County. "The [Potomac] river served the early settlers as a road...bringing the London tobacco merchant to their doors".² Commercial travel in the lower Potomac was frustrated, however, by the countless boulders and seasonal swelling and shrinking of the water level around the Little and Great Falls.

Efforts to tame the Potomac and its tributaries began in 1774 with the construction of canals and locks, providing a route for merchants and traders to circumnavigate Little Falls. These early initiatives were squelched by political "opposition from Baltimore and Bay citizens [who] killed the bill for Potomac navigation in the Maryland Assembly."³



Map of the restored section of the canal from Washington, D.C. to Seneca.

Courtesy of the Montgomery County Historic Society

The political tension stemming from territorial rivalry and protectionist attitudes revealed in these early transportation initiatives proved to be a pivotal factor shaping transportation decisions throughout the decades.

The Potowmack Company, incorporated in 1784, took up the challenge of developing canals and a lock system along the Potomac. Unfortunately, and despite the best efforts of its president, George Washington, the company failed to fulfill its charter. Engineering errors, inferior and faulty materials, and the lack of sufficient and consistent funding contributed to the ultimate loss of the company's charter in 1823.

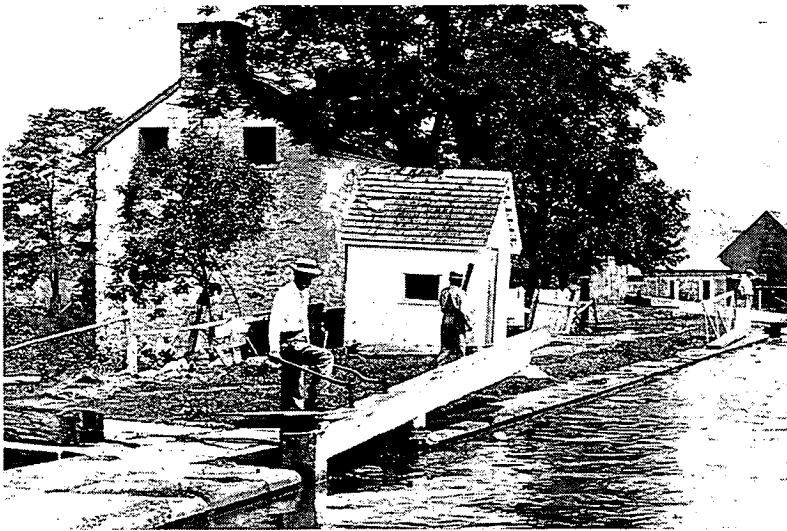
Renewed efforts to harness the use of the Potomac were spearheaded by the "Friends of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal".

Survey work by Thomas Moore of Sandy Spring "indicated that a canal would be a practical solution to the problem of Potomac navigation." ⁴

"A successful canal from Georgetown to Cumberland, or

eventually to Pittsburgh as its promoters were advocating, would benefit all the Maryland and Virginia counties along the Potomac, but the real beneficiaries of the western trade would be the businessmen of the District and their Montgomery County neighbors." ⁵

Construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O Canal) began on the same day in 1828 that ground was broken for construction of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O Railroad) tracks originating in Baltimore.



The race between the two technologies was on.

Development of the railroad line consistently out-paced that of the canal. While over 20 miles of the canal were constructed and in use by 1831 between Georgetown and Seneca, 70 miles of track had been laid between Baltimore and Frederick during that same year.

Completed in 1850, the C&O Canal stretched 184.5 miles from Georgetown to Cumberland. Its impact on Montgomery County was tremendous. The canal was the County's first economic development transportation tool. It created new jobs and a relatively dependable pathway for commerce into and out of the County.

"Canal boats carried more than 100,000 tons of cargo, producing toll revenues of almost \$65,000. Pulled along by more than 3,000 mules, more than 700 barges plied the canal at its peak of operation. In 1875, barges hauled almost 1 million tons of cargo through the water way and produced almost \$500,000 in annual tolls." ⁶

Although the economic impact of the C&O Canal was significant, the railroad, an extended turnpike and highway system, and the introduction of the automobile made canal use obsolete by the turn of the century.

The Majestic Roar of The Locomotive

"The quaint MARC railroad stations that remain in Montgomery County today are remnants of a real estate boom time in the 1870's when the coming of rail transportation changed the county irrevocably.

"Originally, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad planned to build straight westward from Baltimore to the Ohio River. But after the Civil War, Washington grew from a sleepy town to a bustling city, and it became obvious that any main branch would have to include the Capital City.

"[In 1865,] the railroad decided to build a 49-mile-long 'Metropolitan Branch' running from the old B&O station downtown to Point of Rocks, Md., at a cost of \$3 million.

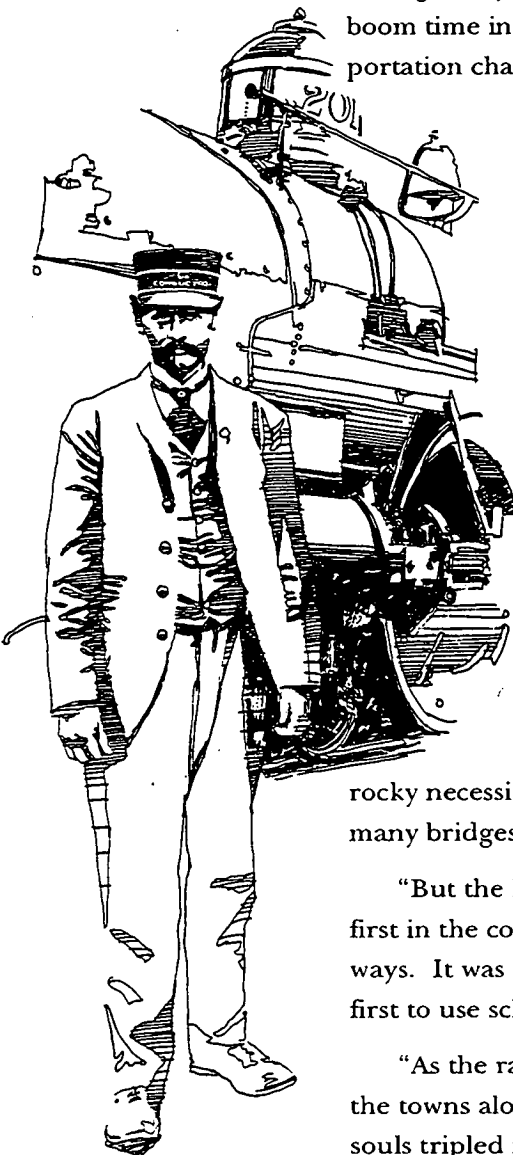
"It was considered by many to be a risky undertaking. On its bisecting path through Montgomery County, the Maryland piedmont terrain was rough and rocky necessitating many 'cuts' through solid rock, and many bridges.

"But the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, [one of] the first in the country, was considered a pioneer in many ways. It was the first to carry passengers for a fare, the first to use schedules and the first to use steam engines.

"As the railroad was built, there were big changes in the towns along its way. Rockville's population of 670 souls tripled in the next 25 years, as resorts and hotels advertised the benefits of 'Peerless Rockville'.

"Washington residents were urged to take a vacation from that swampy, low-lying city and spend a weekend or a summer in Rockville's 'health-giving air,' highly regarded by residents as being 'mosquito and malaria-free'.

"After the coming of the railroad, Gaithersburg was at once transformed into a commercial center of the north-



ern and central part of the county. A bank, hotel and grain mill were built soon after the last rail was laid on February 8, 1873.

“The trains carried not only passengers, but freight, so agricultural enterprises had a more efficient means of marketing their products. Dairy farms located along the corridor prospered, with access to Washington markets.

“Along the route of the railroad there were 26 train stations. Some, such as the stations at Dickerson, Point of Rocks and Boyds, were grand [brick] structures designed by Ephraim Francis Baldwin, an architect [for the B&O] well known for his train station designs. Others were more austere versions, and some were simple ‘lean-tos’ to protect passengers from the elements.

“Many of the original stops were phased out through the years as the B&O faced dwindling ridership. Some of the now-defunct stops listed in a 1919 timetable are familiar to us only as street names, school names or shopping centers: Buck Lodge, Waring, Clopper, Brown (near Brown Station School in Gaithersburg), Derwood, Westmore (near Montgomery College in Rockville), Autrey Park, Hapline, and Randolph.

“Completed in 1873, the railroad served as a ‘corridor’ for growth and brought an immediate increase in land values. Washington and local entrepreneurs began investment schemes, new developments and real estate syndicates. New England and British capital also came in.

“In some places, building cost increased at a rate of \$100 per day. With more and more civil service employees in Washington, investors felt comfortable developing suburban communities for them. Buyers were urged to build summer homes and live year-round in the new developments and commute to their Washington jobs. There were 12 trains a day on the new route, and the fare for the 45-minute ride from Rockville to Washington was 60 cents.

“Growth first started in [Linden, Takoma Park,] Garrett Park and Kensington, but quickly moved to Rockville and Gaithersburg. During the boom time,

Rockville real estate agent Cooke Luckett reported (in 1889) that a good portion of his business consisted of the sale of 'truck-gardens and grass farms'. The investment frenzy of 1887 to 1892 ended with the 'panic of 1893' but prosperity and land values returned again by 1898." ⁷

Rail lines laced the country and formed the basic tool for the nation's economic development throughout the turn of the 20th century. But, just as the trolley gave way to the car, so did passenger rail give way to bus travel and, eventually, air travel.

The B&O Brunswick line, which ran from Martinsburg, West Virginia to Union Station in D.C., lost significant numbers of riders following World War II, as did every major rail line across the country. It would seem that the day of passenger rail supremacy in America had passed. Lines were abandoned or ill-maintained. Encroachment and sale of the rights-of-way were allowed. Stations were closed and many significant rail structures crumbled to ruin.

Surprisingly, a resurgence in demand for rail travel began in the 70s. Several forces combined with a general change in individual commuting patterns to bring about the renewed interest. Jobs were no longer an easy 20 or 30 minutes from home. People tended to commute further distances and logically sought the quickest route to employment centers. The energy crisis of the mid-70s was upon us and long lines at the gas pump, rationing and soaring prices made commuting by rail an attractive option for many. Gridlock, the latest term for traffic congestion in urban areas, became the norm for peak commuting periods. New roads were under construction to alleviate congestion, but rail travel was already in place and benefitted by default.

Despite the renewed interest, private passenger rail companies were past their prime. Profits were nonexistent and debts were insurmountable. As of 1971, the B&O lost \$2 for every dollar received in passenger service. The years of dwindling ridership had taken their toll and, unfortunately, the renewed interest in rail travel was too little and too late.

In 1974, the B&O increased service on the Brunswick line but only with a guaranteed subsidy from the State for all costs in excess of revenues. This subsidy was granted as part of the Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) plan to improve and increase service along the Brunswick line.

According to a 1972 letter to James P. Gleason, County Executive, from Harry Hughes, Secretary of MDOT, the State had designed a proposal "for state assumption of the total non-federal share of the capital equipment costs and assumption of all of the operating costs which are not covered by projected revenues. Also included in the program is the provision that each county will assume the one-third (1/3) non-federal costs of the improvements to the stations and parking facilities within its jurisdictions."

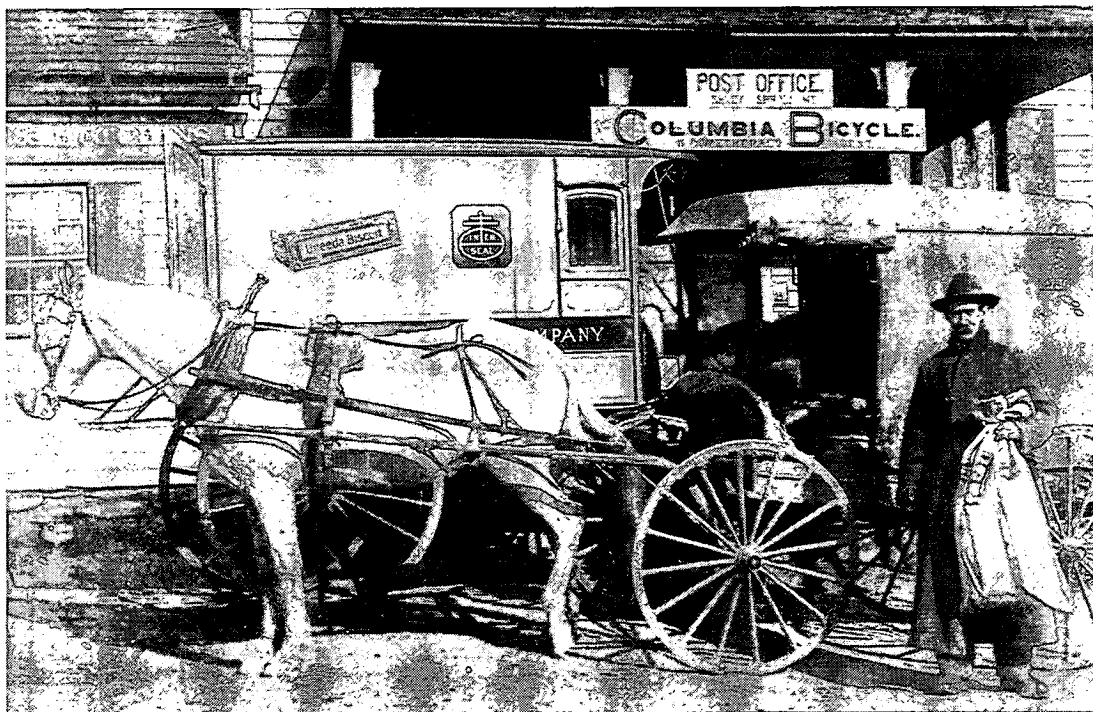
State involvement in passenger rail service had begun and culminated in the creation of the State Rail Administration (SRA) under MDOT in 1978. Initially, SRA contracted with the B&O Corporation to provide the rolling stock, maintenance, crew, and access to the rail lines. SRA continues to contract with CSX, the successor company to the B&O RR Company, for rail access, maintenance and crews, but most of the rolling stock is now owned by the State.

In 1985, the SRA introduced the Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC) name to create a uniformed marketing image for the State's subsidized service. Previously, train sets were made up of cars with a variety of markings, such as B&O, C&O, Chessie System, CSX and New Jersey Rail, to name a few. Today, commuters recognize the familiar blue and orange colors of MARC trains along the Brunswick line traveling into and through Montgomery County.

Presently, MARC service provides 14 trains daily on the Brunswick line, as compared to 12 trains in 1873, and carries approximately 5,000 passengers per day. Plans for providing mid-day and reverse direction service on the Brunswick line are being discussed for the future as demand on the line continues to grow.

The Advent of the Trolley

While early pioneering entrepreneurs labored to create the nation's expansive railroad system at the end of the 19th century, others turned their attention to the transportation needs of the ever-increasing numbers of city dwellers. In urban areas, the horse drawn carriage initially gave way to the horsecar and then to the horse drawn omnibus that served as an urban stage coach. It was the technological and engineering advances made in the construction of the intracontinental rail road system, however, that actually laid the foundation for development of urban street car systems. Despite this impending revolution in urban transportation, however, the use of horses extended well into the 20th century. "The [horse drawn] Sandy Spring Stage, for example, carried passengers and mail between Laurel and Sandy Spring until 1916."⁸



Since before the turn of the century, the Sandy Spring Stage carried passengers and mail between Laurel and Sandy Spring. This glass plate photo was taken in 1916, just before the stage ceased operation.

Courtesy, Montgomery County Historical Society

"The first street railway proposal in Washington [D.C.] was one presented to Congress in 1854 by George Yerby ..." ⁹ Although the idea for a street railway system was shunned as neither practical nor cost effective in 1854, by 1862, 252,000 Union soldiers were encamped in the Capital City, and the reality of maintaining daily government activities while simultaneously meeting the needs of a large army shed light on the positive advantages a street railway system might bring.

The country's political leaders "...no doubt saw that efficient public transit in Washington would materially help the war effort." ¹⁰ Secondly, Washington's streets were unpaved in 1862. "A metal wheel on a metal rail was a considerable improvement over horse omnibuses" ¹¹ for a city that contained in excess of 313,000 troops and residents at the time.

Construction of Washington's street railway system provided the gateway to early and yet significant development of real estate in Montgomery County.

"As in other cities, the street railway, by providing quick, frequent and cheap transportation, began the movement to the suburbs. The movement was slight with horse cars but accelerated rapidly with the coming of the electric [trolley] car. Real estate values were set by the closeness of the land to a car line. Indeed, a number of lines were built to develop real estate. Thus, major suburbs developed along the car lines and centers of shopping at their junctions." ¹²

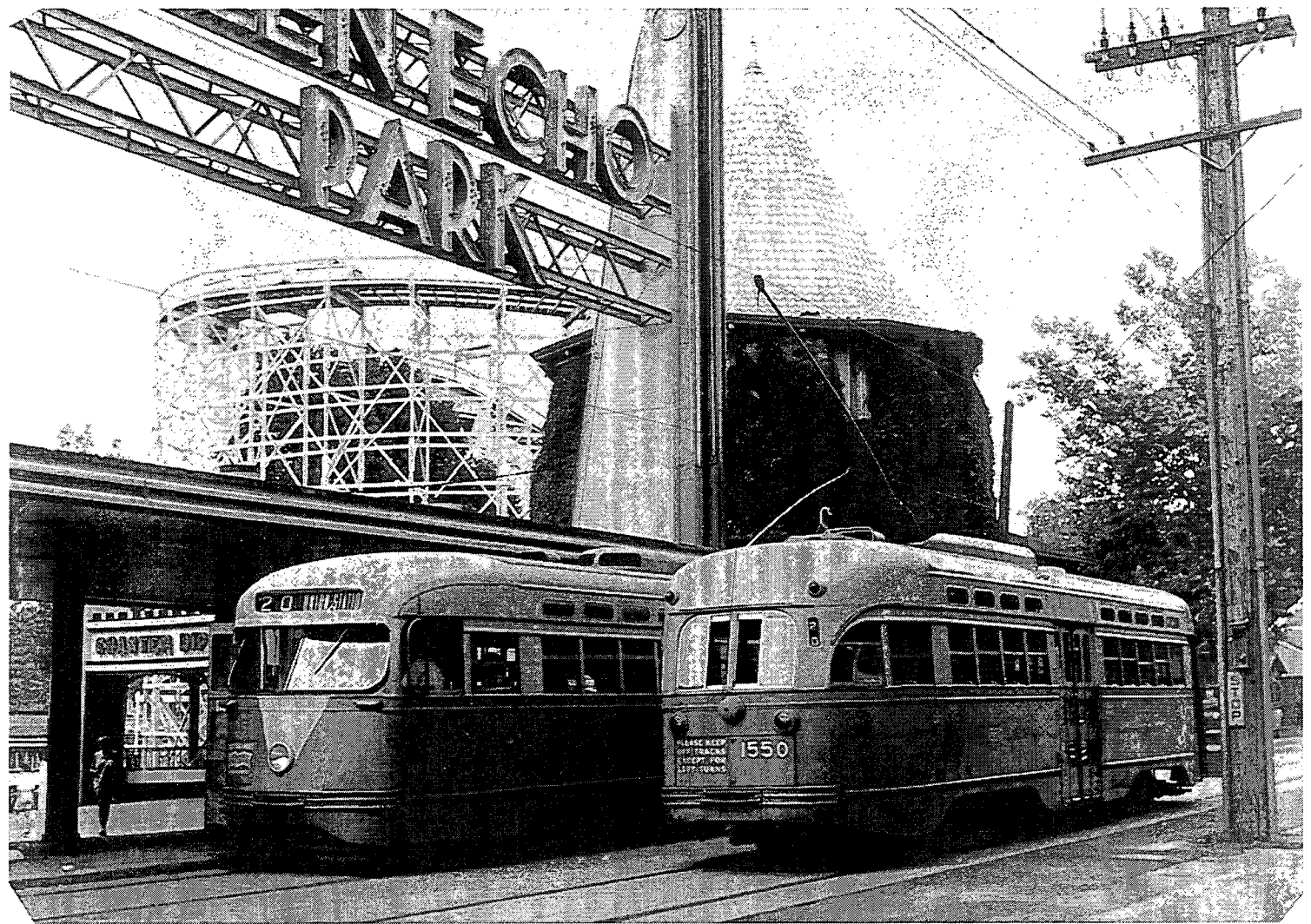


"I-I won't live way out in the country, we'll never have any neighbors and nobody'll ever be able to find us ...!"

-Courtesy of Artist Newman Sudduth, Evening Star

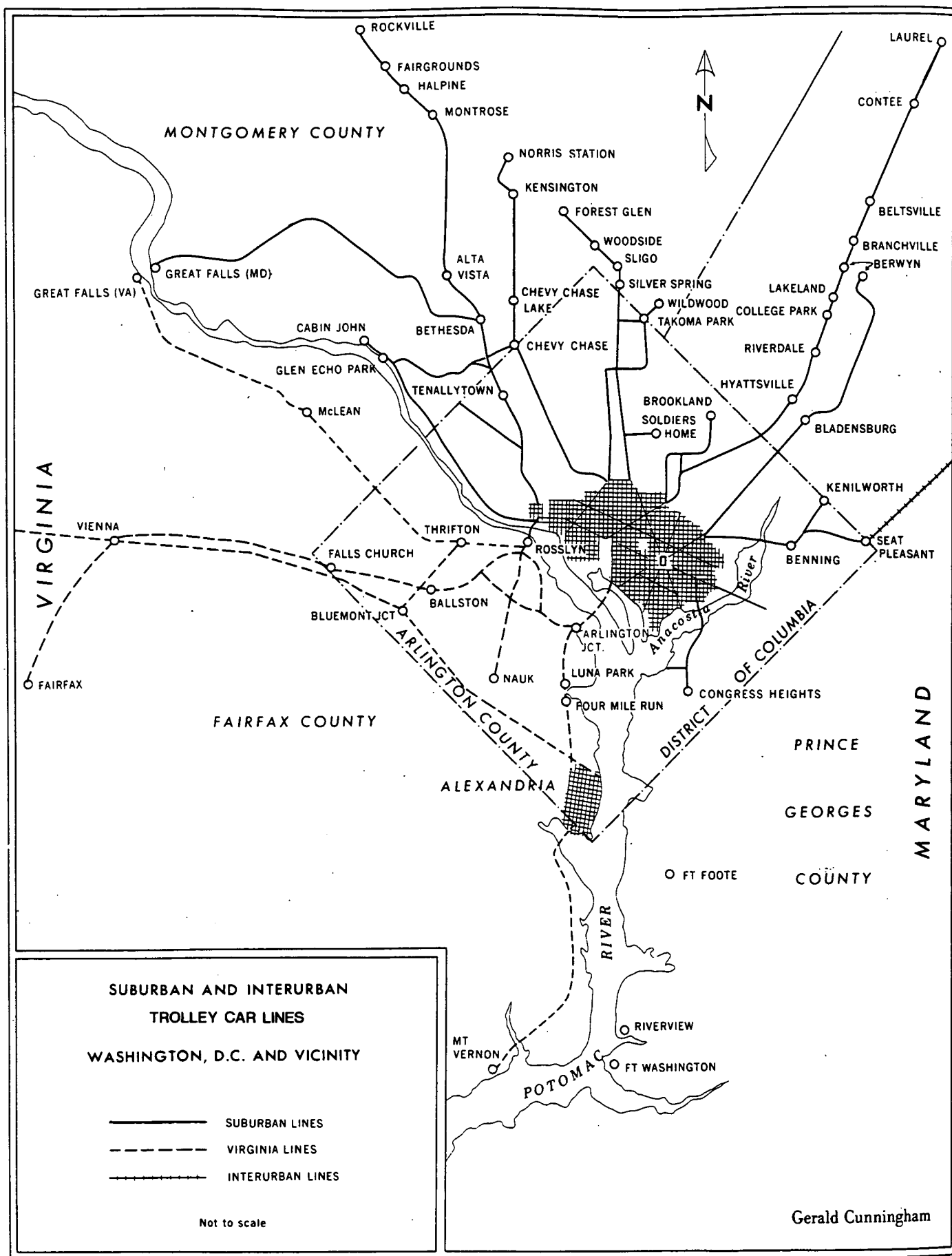
Courtesy Historic Takoma, Inc.

In contrast to other urban areas, however, Washington's suburbs were more often the location of summer homes or resorts for wealthy city dwellers than housing sites for immigrant populations or blue-collar workers, as in cities such as Boston or Philadelphia. The development of Washington's suburban streetcar system,



Originally the site of the Chautauqua, Glen Echo developed as a popular amusement park. The trolley became an efficient means of travel and contributed to the general development of the communities along the Potomac River.

*Photo by Fred Schreider.
Courtesy, Montgomery County Historical Society*



therefore, was generally underwritten by real estate developers who foresaw the need for transit service to the new communities they were creating. Given the technology to develop transit service into areas outlying the city, Montgomery County, with its beautiful countryside paralleling the Potomac River, naturally became a choice location for exclusive residential development during the late 1800's.

One of the first streetcar lines into Montgomery County stretched from Union Station to Cabin John Bridge. Following its opening in 1895, it quickly earned the reputation of being one of the more scenic trolley rides in the country.

"When the line first opened, it went right through an existing and operating dairy barn with cows on both sides of the line! There were a number of high trestles, very few road crossings, and lots of heavy wooded countryside interrupted by delightful and impressive views of the Potomac River Valley. " ¹³

Cabin John Bridge, Glen Echo and Bethesda Park were important Montgomery County destinations for city dwellers. Before more aggressive residential development occurred in these locations, they were the sites of amusement parks, resorts and Chautauquas that served as popular locations of entertainment and cultural enrichment. They also provided city residents a much needed escape from the overwhelming heat and insects that plagued Washington during the summer months.

The map on the preceeding page, taken from LeRoy O. King Jr.'s book *100 Years of Capital Traction: The Story of Streetcars in the Nations Capital*, shows an extensive streetcar system at an initial peak of its use in 1914.

While streetcars clattered busily along city tracks, buses and automobiles were gaining in popularity during the early days of World War I. Streetcar usage within the metropolitan Washington area initially out-paced that of buses, particularly during the gas rationing days of World War II, as shown on the following chart (page 16). But plentiful gasoline supplies following the war caused automobile usage to surge. Cars, trolleys and buses com-

peted for space on the city streets. The resulting congestion combined with the demand for greater route flexibility caused a re-examination of the streetcar's use in mass transit.

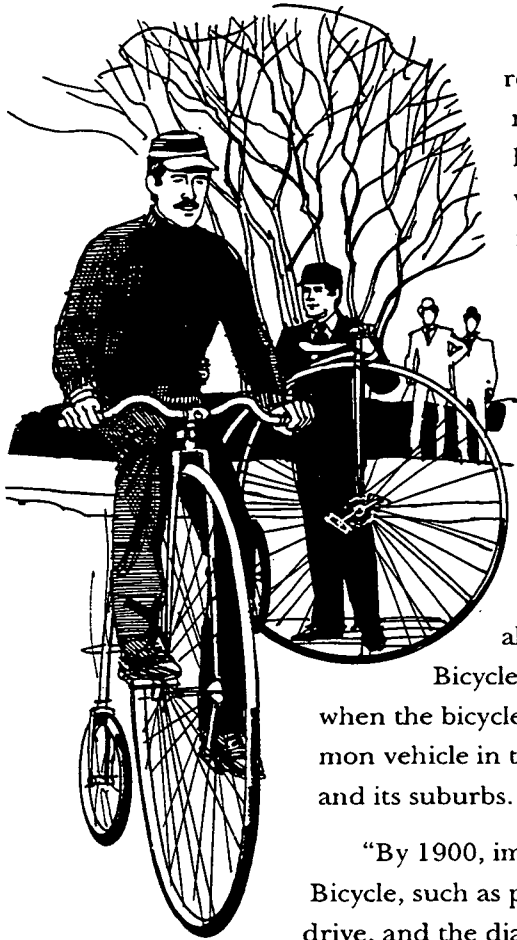
Buses could be directed to respond quickly to changes in demand for a particular route but, without continuous and substantial re-investment in the system, streetcars could not. The need to alleviate congestion and assure a responsive and yet economical mass transit system meant that streetcars had to go.

Slowly but surely, streetcar lines were converted to bus lines. Many lines that could not be converted were abandoned throughout the 1920's and 1930's. And then, on January 27, 1962, Washington D.C. saw the last run of its few remaining streetcars, many hung with banners that read "It's A Tragedy".

*Metro Washington:
Comparison of Rail & Bus Usage¹⁴*

YEAR	POPULATION	TOTAL PASSENGERS CARRIED		
		TROLLEY	BUS	TOTAL
1940	968,000	164,166,385	86,127,241	250,293,626
1942		274,679,449	180,137,379	454,816,828
1944		336,004,507	199,491,360	535,495,867
1945		255,507,589	155,780,650	411,288,239
1950	1,462,100	191,208,326	160,340,416	351,548,740

A Bicycle Built for Two



“While the trolleys and railroads served as major modes of mass transportation from the late 1800s to early 1900s, there was still a largely unmet need for a more personal form of mechanized transportation.

The invention of the bicycle helped satisfy this need.

Development of the bicycle from the early Draisine (dandy horse) model in 1816, to the Velocipede in 1867, to the Ordinary (High Wheeler) in 1879, and eventually to the British rover (Safety Bicycle) in 1885 marked a period when the bicycle became an increasingly common vehicle in the streets of Washington, D.C. and its suburbs.

“By 1900, improvements to the Safety Bicycle, such as pneumatic tires, roller chain drive, and the diamond frame, made bicycling even easier. The independent, long-distance travel afforded by the bicycle made it a highly popular mode of transportation.

“Initially the bicycle was used for pleasure rides and racing, but later for business and work purposes as well. Bicycles vied for space with electric trolleys, horse-drawn carriages, and pedestrians on crowded streets.

“Either out of self-defense or for purely social reasons, bicyclists banded together in clubs, such as the League of American Wheelman. These clubs lobbied State legislatures for improved roads and were often successful in getting roads paved. In 1896, Stuart P. Johnson, a civil and

topographic engineer, published *Roundabout Washington—A Bicycle Route Map*, showing roads of the Washington area (including a portion of Montgomery County) and indicating their suitability for bicycling. Such efforts went a long way toward making bicycling as popular as it was in the 1890s.

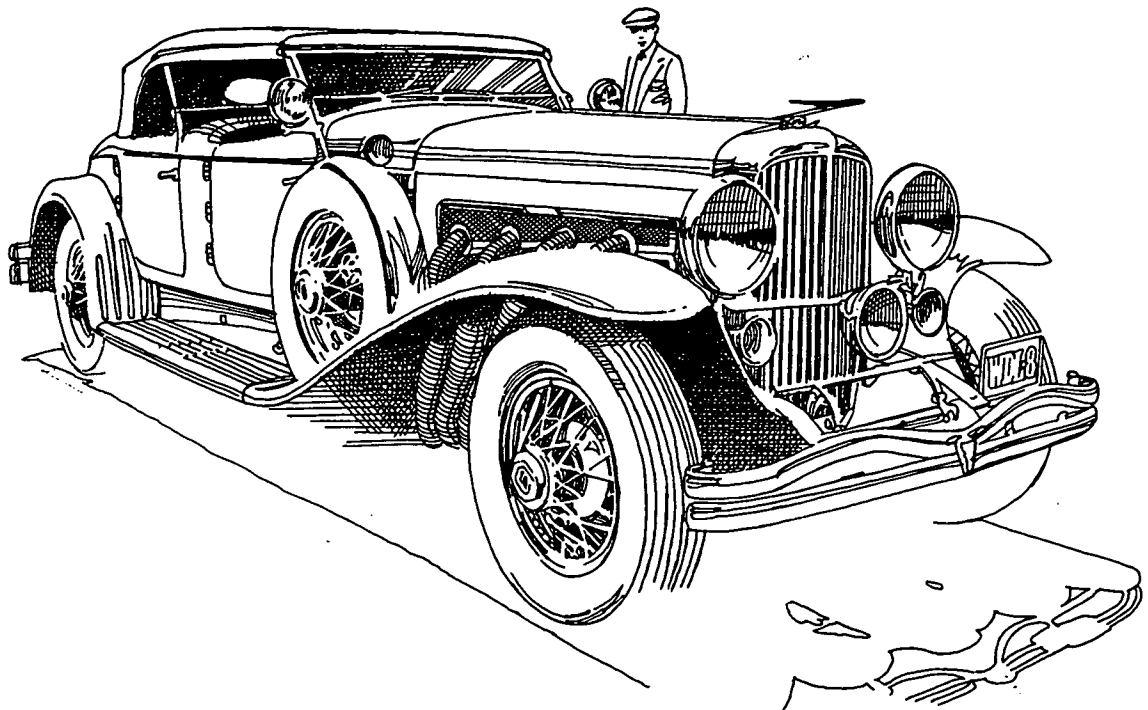
“Ironically, the bicycle’s contributions to improved transportation—mass production technology, paved roads, and a new and powerful sense of personal mobility—led to its demise soon after 1900. People wanted more range, carrying capacity, and comfort than the bicycle could offer and thus naturally turned to a newly-developed motor-powered vehicle called the automobile.

“As the automobile increased in popularity, bicycle use diminished and was practically relegated to a child’s toy. This situation persisted, except for brief resurgence during the 1929 Depression and the World Wars, until 1960 when the European 10-speed lightweight bicycle was introduced to this country.

“The 10-speed bicycle offered versatility and pedaling ease, and perhaps most importantly, respectability in the eyes of teen-agers and adults. From 1960 on bicycle sales in the U.S. increased dramatically, with over 50% of sales attributed to adults. Again, as in the 1890’s, bicyclists have lobbied for better bicycling facilities. The result has been a new spurt of bikeway construction in parks and along roads of Montgomery County by Federal, State and County agencies.”¹⁵

Cars Rule the Land

"[The auto] changed the face of America. Villages which had once prospered because they were 'on the railroad' languished with economic anemia... The inter-urban trolley perished or survived only as a pathetic anachronism... The whole country was covered with a network of passenger bus-lines. In thousand of towns, at the beginning of the [1920] decade a single traffic officer at the junction of Main Street and Central Street had been sufficient for the control of traffic. By the end of the decade, what a difference!—red and green lights, blinkers, one-way streets, boulevard stops, stringent and yet more stringent parking ordinances—and still a shining flow of traffic that backed up for blocks along Main Street every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Slowly but surely the age of steam was yielding to the gasoline age." ¹⁶



The years following World War I were a time of national prosperity and Americans flaunted their new-found wealth and freedom through the purchase of "brand spanking new" automobiles.

The technological achievement of Henry Ford's assembly line mass production approach to automobile manufacturing greatly reduced the individual cost of cars. Unlike earlier hand-made models, which sold for approximately \$4,000, automobiles of the 'Roaring 20s' cost approximately \$500 and offered a reasonable and economical mode of transportation for personal use. "In 1919 there were 6,771, 000 passenger cars in service in the United States; by 1929 there were no less than 23,121,000." ¹⁷ Of those 23 million cars, 13,000 were owned by Montgomery County residents.

Public policies regarding road construction and maintenance kept pace with the growing interest in automobile ownership. The Good Roads Movement of 1908, a farmers initiative to pave existing roads and thereby improve accessibility to area markets, resulted in an ambitious road building campaign in Maryland between 1910 and 1915. River Road was one of the first roads to be paved in Montgomery County as part of this effort.

Following World War II, suburban residential development exploded through out the country. This phenomenon was largely triggered by federal policies that created readily available and low-interest new home construction loans for G.I.s, simultaneously with the construction of a defense-related national turnpike system linking large urban areas. Homes were built in suburban enclaves encircling the cities. Suburban residents, with little or no access to mass transit, drove to work and drove to shopping opportunities primarily in downtown areas. But then jobs began to abandon cities and move to the suburbs also.

To keep pace with the suburban economic boom occurring in the latter 40s and throughout the 50s and 60s, roads—entirely auto-dependent transportation links—were planned between burgeoning housing and job cen-

ters. Roads could be built in suburbia much more cheaply and with far greater speed than a railway system. When traditional urban retailers fled Downtown with lightening speed after jobs and housing, they followed the 'when in Rome' rule of development and built solely auto-dependent retail meccas in suburbia. Everyone could drive to the strip center or mall and fill baskets to the brim with contentment in the efficiency and wonder of this incredibly modern, post-war age.

Such efficiency and progressive planning have wrought the congestion, suburban sprawl, general dependence on single-occupant vehicle use, and pollution we see today. But these efforts have also spawned creative solutions to those very problems and have set the stage for the transportation infrastructure we recognize today and envision for tomorrow.

“... Leave the Driving to Us”: Metrobus, Ride-On and Metrorail

By the early part of the 20th century, private bus companies had established passenger service along familiar and well-travelled trolley routes. Initially, bus ridership was developed and strongest only in dense urban areas. It wasn't until the decline of rail passenger service around 1946 that private bus companies began to dominate intra-continental passenger travel as well. The preference for bus transportation was lost, however, with national population shifts in the late 40s and throughout the 50s.

Bus ridership plummeted nationwide following World War II in direct relationship to the unprecedented migration of residents from cities to surrounding areas with little or no bus service and the nation's subsequent dependency on automobile ownership. Private bus companies attempted to maintain existing levels of service while accommodating new areas, albeit of reduced demand.



Takoma Metro station in the early 1980's. The bicycles are evidence of the return to a time-honored form of transportation.

*Photograph: Paul McNight.
Courtesy of Historic Takoma, Inc.*

Consequently, companies ended up competing for ever dwindling profits through out the 30s, 40s and 50s and many simply went belly-up.

By the late 60s, it became increasingly apparent that adequately sustaining the cost of buses for mass transportation was essentially a losing proposition for private industry.

A second and equally serious decline in bus ridership was caused by the racial tension and riots that plagued most cities during the many 'long, hot summers' of the mid-60s. Fear of inner-city areas and possible exposure to violence brought about not only reduced bus ridership but additional residential and commercial flight from large urban areas across the country.

Neither the actual loss of ridership and profits nor the increasing and persistent negative perception of bus use and safety mitigated public responsibility to accommodate the sizable non-auto-driver working population, however. The challenge of providing a suitable mass transportation system was raised in urban areas across the nation throughout the 50s and 60s. This dilemma forced local governments to re-examine the role of mass transportation as an economic development tool and, therefore, to determine a level of commitment to fund necessary subsidies of the cost of bus service or to create entirely new transportation options.

In the Washington metropolitan area, this challenge was met with legislation enacted in 1959 to create the National Capital Transportation Agency (NCTA). The NCTA created a plan for a 25-mile rapid rail transit system. This plan was approved by Congress in 1965 along with authorization of \$150 million of federal and District of Columbia funds to initiate work on the system. By the following year, a regional vision of the rapid rail system was drafted and embodied in legislation creating the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). WMATA was organized to continue the work of the NCTA and complete construction of an expanded 97.2-mile regional metrorail system. The initial regional

plan called for 38.4 miles of rapid rail transit service in the District of Columbia, 29.7 miles in Maryland (19.6 miles in Montgomery County with all but 1.3 miles in service as of 1993) and 29.1 miles in Virginia.

Construction began on the system in 1969. Seven years later, the first 4.6 miles of Metro service were opened in downtown Washington from Farragut North to Rhode Island Avenue. According to a 1976 letter from Sterling Tucker, Chairman of WMATA, to the President and Congress of the United States, Metro's opening saw three times the number of daily riders than originally anticipated. By 1978, plans for the regional system had grown from the original 25-mile system to include a 103-mile, 86-station system and construction was non-ending.

As plans for the metrorail continued to take shape toward the end of the 1960s, however, it was clear that the remaining private bus companies serving the District and surrounding metropolitan areas were close to bankruptcy. It was time to act or lose the only mass transit system in-place at the time and the very buses that would eventually supply the life blood of people to the metrorail system once it was operational.

To solve this problem, a regional agreement was forged in May of 1973 to expand the role of WMATA. WMATA would purchase and then operate the service of the last four private bus companies. WMATA's funds came from subsidies contributed by each of the jurisdictions to benefit from the system including: Washington, D.C., Alexandria and Arlington, and Fairfax, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.

WMATA initiated slight improvements to bus service in Montgomery County with the take-over of the private companies in 1973. These improvements were essentially geared toward increasing the number of buses available along arterials in the down-county area. Metrobus service was extremely limited within neighborhoods throughout the down-county area and non-existent for emerging growth centers such as Gaithersburg. Service beyond Rockville was unheard of.

To increase bus service would be a costly option for Montgomery County, however. WMATA's work force commanded high wages in addition to the overhead cost of the Authority itself and, of course, any major change in service would require a regional agreement as well. Instead, in December of 1973, the County chose to initiate planning for an independent, County-run bus service to cover areas that were either under served or completely devoid of bus service through WMATA. Montgomery County's Transit System, called Ride-On, initiated revenue service in 1975.

The County's initial philosophy and intent in creating Ride-On still guides the growth of the system today. Ride-On was created to service collector/distributor routes with lower passenger volumes and to operate solely within County boundaries. The County initiated service with a fleet of 20 mini-buses (20-foot)-12 to serve the Silver Spring-Takoma Park area and 8 in Gaithersburg. The fare was 25 cents for all trips, regardless of the length and, to the extreme delight of County planners, 900 passengers per day, a number far in excess of original projections, made use of the County's independent transit system.

Transit service within the County was geared toward getting people to jobs in downtown Washington in the most efficient manner. Ride-On buses connected commuters to Metrobuses that took people downtown and brought them back to the Ride-On bus connection in the evening. The system worked well. As demand increased throughout the County, Ride-On grew and adapted, funneling even larger numbers of people to the Metrobus routes.

Ride-On made a significant and lasting change in its pattern of operation with the opening of the County's first Metrorail station at Silver Spring in 1978. Instead of bringing commuters to a Metrobus stop, Ride-On took passengers to the Metrorail station and commuters then traveled to town by rail. At the same time, the traditionally larger Metrobuses were oriented to provide service only

along the County's major corridors. Metrobuses terminated their trips at the Metrorail station as well.

Simultaneously, traveling downtown entirely by bus was artfully discouraged by forcing commuters to make many time consuming transfers as routes were shortened. Commuters soon became oriented to use of the Metrorail system and both buses and people have readjusted with each new Metrorail station opening in the County, including the Shady Grove line that opened to Grosvenor in August of 1984 and then opened all the way to Shady Grove in December of 1984, followed by the opening of the Forest Glen and Wheaton stations on the Glenmont line in 1990.

Paralleling the growth of the Metrorail system and the changes this brought about in the feeder bus system, employment patterns were changing throughout the metropolitan area. More jobs were locating within Montgomery County throughout the latter 70s and the job growth in the County during the 80s was nothing short of phenomenal. For the first time, commuter service demand for east-west travel equalled, and today exceeds, the pace of demand for north-south travel into the District. As of 1993, Ride-On carries 58,000 passengers per day, Metrobus carries 53,000 passengers and Metrorail carries 110,000 passengers daily – to, from and within Montgomery County.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Continuously marking the path of our travels, the County's transportation system and that of the nation strive to increase our options for efficient and economical connections between home, work and life's abundant pleasures. Unlike bold transportation plans of the past, however, today's strategies are mindful of the need to protect the environment and crafted by budget scenarios that reflect stiff competition for government dollars. Futuristic people movers, a return to trolleys or light-rail systems, and a network of transitways and high-occupancy vehicle lanes that address environmental concerns, while at the same time enhance the overall system, are all planned for Montgomery County's foreseeable future.

Ironically, the solutions we design for future transportation needs are shaped by the same question that has crafted transportation decisions throughout time – what resources do we have in hand, including time, money, demand and technology, and how is the use of those resources placed in acceptable balance with the political, social and financial pressures which define our time?

Where we go from here and how we travel to get there is, as always, ultimately a matter of our own choosing.■

Notes

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